

THE HOUSING PARTNERSHIP / FAIR HOUSING COMMITTEE

Fiscal Year 2004

This past year saw the completion of a major project, the decision to go forward on the development of affordable housing on Town-owned land, and a feasibility study on the Housing Trust Fund (HTF). Operating with an incomplete roster and without the assistance of a Town Planner, the Committee worked hard on old and new projects to increase affordable housing and to raise awareness of the need for more.

The Committee continued work on the 2003 Affordable Housing Plan (AHP), begun last year under the direction of Jeanne Armstrong of LandUse Inc. Several working meetings were held to assess findings and give feedback. The Committee held a public hearing in the fall to review and consider implications of the current housing situation, and to review and refine draft goals and strategies. The final report was organized around the recently revised (2002) Amherst Housing Policy with strategies to pursue those goals, a list of priority actions, and steps toward implementation. Penny Pitts gave a report on the Plan at Spring Town Meeting and was interviewed on ACTV for the League of Women Voters program, and the Bulletin published an Opinion piece by Audrey Child. It will be used as background material for introduction of the HTF and other projects. We presented the Plan to the Select Board for approval in June; action has been delayed due to a citizen critique.

The HP/FHC and the Amherst Housing Authority (AHA) held a meeting with Judy Steinkamp and Michael Gilbert of UMass regarding a report on their study of graduate student housing on their Olympia Drive property. Although the report showed great potential, the new Chancellor rejected it in favor of building undergraduate housing on campus. While we had hoped to work together on a joint project, the Committee decided to go forward with Town-owned Olympia Drive property development and made it a major priority. TM requested that the Legislature clarify wording in the original article so as to permit affordable housing, as had been the intent, and plans are now ready to go forward.

Another identified goal of the AHP was the formation of a Housing Trust Fund. We asked for Community Preservation Act Committee (CPAC) funding from Town Meeting to study and to set up the legal steps for a HTF. A subcommittee of Nancy Gregg and Audrey Child from HP/FHC and Donna Crabtree and Judy Brooks from AHA hired Winton Pitcoff to work with us to determine feasibility and develop a plan of operation. We held a focus group to critique the Draft plan. The subcommittee plans to report on the final draft at the Fall TM.

Our CPAC representative, Audrey Child, worked with Peter Jessop and Donna Crabtree of AHA to request \$133,550 for current projects. These included \$40,550 additional funds for Tamarack Drive property to decrease the size of the mortgage; \$10,000 to determine feasibility of a HTF and recommend a system of organization and operation; \$75,000 for predevelopment costs and to secure a Main Street property for affordable housing; and \$8,000 to cover carrying costs for two potential accessible units of affordable housing from a gift. All these requests were granted by the CPAC and approved by the Fall 2003 Town Meeting.

Under Joanne Levenson's leadership, the Landlord/Tenant Handbook (LTH) was revised to make it more user-friendly. Tom Coish of UMass did the revisions and saw to its debut online. Frank Wells worked with Town staff to get a HP/FHC page on the Town's website. It was due to be online in August. It will eventually contain the meeting schedule, minutes of meetings,

membership, links to housing agencies, the AHP and LTH, and other affordable housing information. Other items to be added are a log of our CPAC projects and status, updates of current projects, and information on eligibility for affordable housing as we endeavor to inform residents.

Two development projects came before the HP/FHC. The Palley-Bacon development went forward after a zoning change that gave the Town four affordable units in a twelve-unit project. We worked with the developer to assure comparable appearance and construction, and contributed to the plan for selecting eligible buyers under Town and state guidelines. We supported a warrant article for a zoning change on Rte 9 that would also give the Town two affordable units. That project was referred back to the Planning Board for more work.

During the year, members attended a housing conference in Worcester, an ethics seminar for people connected to Town government, and a DHCD workshop on a grant for development funds. We regret the resignation of Bob Mitchell in June to take a position in the field of sustainable development in Boston. We appreciate his work in the Planning Department, and his shepherding of this committee while being so understaffed. We're grateful for the work of Mariana Luz and Joan Lindeman, who did not seek reappointment. Our current members are Penny Pitts, Frank Wells, Nancy Gregg, Hwei Ling Greeney, Carol Moskowitz, and Audrey Child, chair. We look forward to a year under the leadership of Nancy Gregg and are thankful to have the staff assistance of Roy Rosenblatt, who brings professional expertise to a group of volunteers.

Audrey Child, chair